

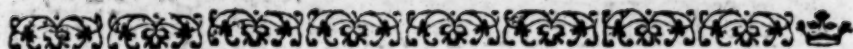


Mr. Swift's

Election-Sermon.

May 31. 1732.



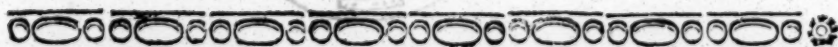


In COUNCIL, June 2. 1732.

Ordered,

THAT *Paul Dudley* and *Jonathan Remington*, Esqrs; give the Thanks of this Board to the Reverend Mr. *John Swift*, for his **SERMON** Preached to the General Assembly, on the Day of Election of Councillors, and desire a Copy thereof in order to its being Printed.

J. Willard, Secr.



62
A
S E R M O N
Preach'd at **B O S T O N**,
BEFORE THE
Great and General Assembly
Of the Province of the
Massachusetts-Bay
I N
New-England,

May 31. M D C C X X X I I.

Being the Anniverfary for the *Election* of
His Majesty's COUNCIL for the Province.

By *John Swift*, M. A.

And Pastor of the Church in Framingham.

B O S T O N in N E W - E N G L A N D :

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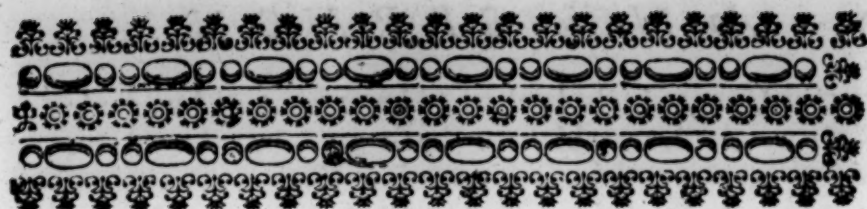
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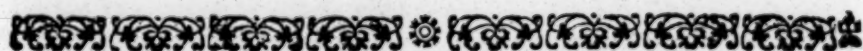
STATE





A N

Election-Sermon.



L U K E xiii. 9.

*AND if it bear Fruit well : And if not,
then after that thou shalt cut it down.*

IMMUTABILITY is an essential Property of that Being that we worship and adore. All created Beings either in the visible or invisible World, are in their own nature mutable : Had it not been so with the Angels, they had never fallen : And Man at his best Estate was altogether vanity. And as to the strongest Constitutions of the several Orders of Men that there have been in the world, either in State or Church, how long have they abode in their honour? What is become of the Four Monarchies? The Assyrian, the Grecian, the Persian and the Roman? And as to the Church catholic or Christs Spouse we read, (a) that She is *beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem*; But what is become of the Beauty of the one or Comeliness of the other? Again, *She looketh forth as the Morning*, whose appearance is not always steady. Fair
as

(a) Cant. 6. 4, 10,

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as the Moon, which hath her increment & her waine. *Clear as the Sun*, which yet hath its *Maculae Solares*, or Sun Spots, and sometimes shines forth with its Meridian brightness, and at other times is clouded or eclips'd. Again, as if the most splendid of inanimate beings were not sufficient to describe her by, she is said to be *terrible as an Army with Banners*, which sometimes is crowned with Victory, and sometimes is defeated. And no particular ecclesiastic constitution, whether formed by GOD or invented by Man, hath prevailed to keep a Church from corruption. The Church of *Israel* it self, tho' it was National and a Theocracy, having their Canons and Regulation from Heaven, yet soon grew corrupt: as in *Jer. 2. 21. Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right Seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?* Here is a doleful change, a noble vine, planted by Heaven, wholly a right Seed, but alas turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine, &c. It was a generous vine, but now a vine turned clear out of kind. And there is a description of the Jewish Church, in its good & bad State, its flourishing & decaying state, its holy & corrupt state, in its fruitful and barren state. And as to the Gospel Churches that we read of, what is become of them? Are they not cut down for their Barrenness? Where is that Church that was at *Jerusalem*? And the Church of the *Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians*, and all the *Seven Asian Churches*, and others? Are they not all cut down for their Apostacy or Barrenness? But to return to *Judea*, because the words that I have now read are the close of a Parable delivered by our Saviour to the *Jews*, to them primarily, not to them only; but to us, and to all who enjoy the means of Grace.

Some Years past, on the occasion that we are now met upon, an ingenious Parallel † was run in this place between *New-England* and *Canaan*: And I wish and pray that we in this Land, may not equalize or exceed the Inhabiters of that in their Sin and Punishment, Barrenness & Doom. In

† By Dr. Colman in his last Election Sermon, 1723.

In the Parable before us, our Lord Jesus sets forth the state of the *Jews*, by a Fig-tree planted in his Vineyard, &c. Now as some Scripture prophecies are often fulfill'd, so some Scripture Parables or Tropes are variously applicable; every Person seated in Christs visible Church is a Tree planted in his Vineyard, and every such Church is a Tree planted in the Vineyard of the World. (b)

For brevity sake, I shall not offer any Analytical account of the parts of this Parable; but keep as near as I can to the words of my Text, and the occasion of our being here.

I. In the words then more generally, we have the continued intercession of the Dresser of the Vineyard for the Barren Fig-tree, *viz.* That it might have longer forbearance, or a reprieve.

II. We have in the words a double Hypothesis, as

1. { If it bear Fruit.
2. { If it bear not Fruit.

And as to the first of these, if it bear Fruit, in the Greek it is *Κ'αν μετ' Ποι'ση καρπον'* i. e. also if it make Fruit, q. d. altho' they are barren, yet if they will in the use of farther means exert the utmost of their Powers, and by GOD's Blessing become fruitful (for all depends on that) why then &c. As to the second of the Hypotheses *and if not*, i. e. if it should not prove fruitful.

III. In the words we have a double Conclusion answerable to the twofold supposition, as

1. If it bear fruit, *Well*. 2. And if not, *Then* thou shalt cut it down. The words *well* and *then* are not in the Original, but here is the figure we call *Aposiopesis*, i. e. when more is intended than is literally express'd, which is elsewhere observable in the Holy Scriptures; or whereby a Person in a Passion breaks off a Discourse, yet so that he may be understood: The plain meaning

(b) Calvin in Loc.

meaning seems to be, that if the Jews who had been for a long time a barren and unfruitful People, should at length prove a religious and fruitful People, then it should be well with them, otherwise ruin and destruction should follow.

IV. There is in the words a Limitation referring to the last concession or conclusion in those words, *After that* thou shalt cut it down. Several weighty Truths are contained in, or flow from this verse, As,

DOCTRINE, I.

That Intercession with G O D for his Sinful People, is a Duty well pleasing to Him.

In our Text and Context, Intercession is made with G O D for the barren figtree : The Intercessor is the Dresser of the vineyard, viz. the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Prophet and High Priest of His People : The Intercession is that the barren Jews might be tryed with farther Time and Means. And now this Heavenly Dresser of the Vineyard shews by His own Example what His Ministers should do, in those things wherein He is imitable by them, in each of which His Example hath the virtue and force of a Command.

And by the way, we may be cautioned against thinking that this Intercession imports that Christ is more merciful than G O D the Father : But it shews the greatness of the mercy and pity of Christ towards such as have deserved His severe Indignation, in that he tries them with Seasons and Means of Salvation, as long as is meet, before he proceeds to utmost severity.

Again, We should be cautioned against blending the Intercession of our great High Priest in Heaven, with our Orisons or dirges, as the manner of some hath been, who among other vendables in their Merchandise of the Souls of Men, (as a Learned Author hath lately set forth in a clear Light) they sell their Masses, Prayers, &c. for the Redemption of Souls : We know, that Christ is our sole Advocate & Intercessor, by virtue of his own merit : He trod the Wine-press of His Fathers Wrath alone,

alone, and of the People there was none with Him, *Isaiah 63. 3.* And to which of the Angels did GOD at any time say, *ask of me, and I will give thee, &c.* as in *Psal. 1. 8.* The Office & Power of asking belongs to Him who is the only begotten Son of GOD (c): Others do not interceed as he doth; all our Prayers and Intercessions pass through His, being mixt with the sweet Incense of His merits, they are offered on that Golden Altar that is before the Throne, as in *Rev. 8. 3, 4.* And now that the Prayers and Intercessions of GOD's Servants and Saints for a perishing People are well pleasing to him is evident from *Ezek. 22. 30.* *I sought for a Man among them that should make up the Hedge and stand in the Gap before me, for the Land that I should not destroy it.* And it is GOD's Will as in *1 Tim 2. 1, 3.* *That Supplications, Prayers, Intercessions &c. be made for all Men, for we are told that this is good and acceptable in the sight of GOD our Saviour, &c.*

DOCTRINE, II.

That if such a People as have been a Degenerate or Barren People, shall at length become a Religious and Fruitful People, all shall be well with them.

Let me here remark, That there are certain Theological Terms or Phrases that are sometimes used in the Holy Scriptures, and in our Ordinary discourses that signify one and the same Thing: Sometimes both Tables of the Moral Law are Comprised under the General term of Religion, or Godliness, Obedience, Righteousness, the Fear of GOD, and the like: Sometimes one of the Graces is put by a Synecdoche for the rest, as Faith, Repentance, &c. So by the General term of Fruitfulness; the whole of our Duty to GOD and to MAN may be comprehended: to such we are bid to say, that it shall be well with them. Tho' the Foundations should be Overthrown and Mountains Removed, Yet it shall be well with such (d) all shall work together for their Good, let them meet with Prosperity or Adversity, yet they may Sleep securely, being assured of this that their

B

best

(c) Charnock, (d) *Isa. 3. 10.*

best State is growing better and better, and all shall be well with them for Time and Eternity. 23d Psalm ult. Were I able, yet Time would fail me to recount the many Promises and Blessings lay'd up in Store to encourage such Fruitfulness as may be seen in many Chapters and Psalms in the Holy Scriptures. Instead of more see Deut. 28 at the beginning. *And it shall come to pass if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the Voice of the Lord thy GOD, to observe and to do all his Commandments which I Command thee this Day: That the Lord thy GOD will set thee on high above all the Nations of the Earth. And all these Blessings shall come upon thee and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken to the Voice of the Lord thy GOD. Blessed shall thou be in the City, &c.* Then follows a long train of Blessings, and well it is and will be with the Enjoyers of them. And happy is that People that are in such a case, *yea happy is that People whose God is the Lord.* If the Tree will be fruitful, there will be cause of rejoicing on all sides, as Mr. Henry on the place saith, "GOD will be pleased for He will be praised, Ministers hands will be strengthened, and such Penitents will be their joy now, and their Crown shortly, nay there will be joy in Heaven for it". And as for the Tree it shall not only be saved from Ekkopion or cutting down, but be transplanted to the heavenly Paradise. GOD will be tender of his faithful People, Jer. 2. 3. *Israel was holiness unto the Lord, all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them saith the Lord.* And how well pleased Christ is therewith, we may read in Cant. 4. 12, 13, 14. *'Tis good being here, &c.* But I must pass from Gerezin to Ebal. And now let us turn the Tables.

And 3dly we may observe,

III. *That GOD will most certainly sooner or later, utterly Ruin & Destroy, such as never bring forth good and acceptable Fruit to himself: or such as are finally Spiritually Barren and Unfruitful.*

Cut it down saith the Owner of the Vineyard, and altho' upon intercession it be Reprieved, yet after the last means are used all consent in the abscision or cutting down of the Tree, and great is the fall thereof. A great part of the Holy Scripture is spent to set forth the misery

misery of such, see *Deut.* 28. from the 15 ver. to the end of the Chapter, *But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee. Cursed shalt thou be in the City, &c.* And then follows a Black Roll of Curses to the end of the Chapter. When such Barren Trees shall have been for a time under the probation of Heaven, GOD will in his vindictive justice cut off their natural Lives, never to be re-enjoyed upon Earth, and exclude them for ever from any place in Heaven, and assign them their portion in everlasting Burnings. How dreadfully hath GOD cut down many barren Trees? Whoever reads *Josephus*, the Jewish Historian, *Clarks Examples*, and the late *Clarkson* and others, will find such an account thereof as will affect any heart of Flesh. But let me instance only in the *Jews*, because my Text so much respects them. That Tree had been lopt by the *Babylonians*; but at length the *Roman Axe* must cut it down: The foresight of which moved our Saviour to weep over *Jerusalem*, as in *Luke* 19. 41, 42. *And when he was come near, he beheld the City, and wept over it*, which is but once more recorded of him in the Gospel, (*John* 11. 35.) as *Dr. Owen* observes. And that the word here used *ἐκλαύσε* denotes a Weeping with Lamentation, and is for our example & imitation; that we might know how deplorable and miserable a thing it is, for a People, a City, a Person to withstand their Day of Grace. And how weighty are our Saviours words that were mixt with his tears over *Jerusalem*? *If thou hadst known*, or *Oh that thou hadst known*. The Greek conjunction *εἰ* is well rendred by *Utinam*, *q. d.* I wish that thou hadst known, *Thou even Thou*, the ingemination is emphatical, *q. d.* Thou Antient City, thou City of *David*, thou Seat of the Temple and all the Worship of GOD, thou antient habitation of the Church; *at least in this thy day, &c. but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days will come*, as in ver. 43. *that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, &c.* Now after those things of their Peace had been hid from their eyes, as in *John* 12 from ver. 37, 42 And in *Romans* 11. 7, 8, 10. & 25, ver. GOD inflicted Temporal Judgments on them, for besides their

afflictions in divers Countries, being tossed up and down by the Deputies of the *Romans*, there were slain (as I read) in *Cesarea*, twenty thousand in one day : At *Alexandria*, fifty thousand another day : At *Zebulon & Joppa* eight thousand & four hundred, besides the burning of the Towns : At *Demascus* ten thousand had their throats cut : In the Siege of *Jerusalem* they so famished that Oxens dung was accounted good meat ----- and some Women boiled their own Children and did eat them ; many thinking to save their Lives by flying to the *Romans*, were slit in pieces to search for Gold and Jewels in their Entrails. Two thousand dyed thus miserably in one Night. Ninety seven thousand were taken Prisoners at the taking of the City by *Titus*, and eleven hundred thousand were slain, the Prisoners were carryed to *Rome* in triumph ; others slain in sundry places at the Conquerors will, some were torn in pieces and devoured by wild Beasts, others were compell'd to march in troops against their fellows, and to kill one another, to make the Spectators sport. Much more may be seen in History concerning the cutting down of that Tree, which once flourished more than any in the World, and sent forth its boughs unto the Sea, and its branches to the Rivers.

And now let them that think they stand take heed least they fall. We may our selves if GOD forsakes us and gives us up, as he did the *Jews*, be in as great danger of *Rome Papal*, as they once thought themselves to be of *Rome Pagan*. GOD can in his just Judgment by one means or other cut us down, or leave us to cut down one another.

En quo discordia cives perduxit miseros, said the Poet of old (e.) And I call to mind a saying among the *Jews*, after their destruction, viz. " That if it had not been for Malice among Neighbours, and for want of Charity, *Jerusalem* had never been destroyed ". They were a very knowing People, but grew very Jealous, Contentious and Malicious : With them was the *Depositum* of the Oracles of GOD, but that light had

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had no kind operation on their Hearts. And I think that among Theologers 'tis counted that *Light* in the Head, and *Malice* in the Heart, are the principal ingredients in the unpardonable Sin.

DOCTRINE IV.

The 4th & last Doctrine is, *That 'tis the Sovereign Will and Pleasure of GOD, that his degenerate People should have various and suitable means used with them, for their Recovery before they are totally and finally ruin'd and destroyed. As in the Text, After that, thou shalt cut it down.*

Here are two Branches in this Observation.

1. *That the means that should be used with a degenerate People, should be various. And*

2. *They should be Suitable.*

1st. *Then they should be Various.*

1. Because the wants of Souls are various, according to their Tempers or Distempers, Temptations and the Times that pass over them. Accordingly they should have *line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little*, and not only continued & unwearied labour used with them, but also a Diversity: on some we must have Compassion, others must be saved with fear, as in *Jude v. 22, 23*. And we know the old Adage, *Reficit Verietas*.

2. Because whatever may be the event as to Man, yet this is the way to bring Glory to GOD. If the Tree be fruitful, that naturally results in the Glory of GOD's Mercy and Grace; and if it remains finally barren, yet the event will be to the Glory of GOD's Justice, which is enhanced by the howlings of the Damned, as well as his Mercy by the Hallelujah's or Prayers of his Saints.

Now GOD will be Gloryfied in his Dispensations to Men, and in his final Disposition of them. As to the former, GOD was pleased to use great variety with the barren *Jews*, which are set down largely in the Holy Scriptures

Scriptures for a witness against *Israel*; but *Vultures* ('tis said) are killed with Oyl of Roses, and *Tygers* grow mad at sweet Perfumes, yet as in 2 Cor. 2. 15. *We are unto God a sweet savour in Christ, in them that are saved and in them that perish.* Such Sinners must perish without Apology, and must confess that they have been fairly treated, and Death and Destruction, i. e. Dead and Damned Men must say in the bottomless pit, as in *Job* 28. 22. That they have heard the fame of Wisdom with their Ears. And in *Isa.* 5. 3, 4. Who is it that GOD appeals to there, when he saith, *Judge I pray you, &c.* but the Consciences of the Guilty.

2dly. The means used with a barren People, must be *Suitable*, otherwise they are not likely to attain their end. And

1. They must be suited to the Revealed Will of GOD in his Word. That is the Rule both for the Vineyard and the Dressers thereof. The *Vineyard* is GOD's own, and every *Tree & Plant* in it, is at GOD's disposal always, the *means* to be used with them are of GOD's contrivance, the *Instruments* who are to improve the means, have their call from GOD, and their furniture to their work, the *Fruit* of the Tree is due to GOD; therefore the means, yea all the means must be suited to His Revealed Will.

2. The means must be suited to the Wants & Capacities of Men; but of that I have said something before. So did the Apostle *Paul*, 1 Cor. 9. 20, 21, 22, 23. Yea and a greater than *Paul*, *Mark* 4. 33. Even the best dresser of the Vineyard, of the Church, that ever was upon the Earth.

Finally, GOD will have various and suitable means used with a degenerate or barren People, because of the Goodness and Mercifulness of his Nature, his Patience, Long-suffering, &c. 'Tis his Glory to appear, as in *Exod.* 34. 6, 7. *The Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and in truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin, &c.*

Tho'

Tho' all the Attributes of GOD are the same with his Essence, yet the acts of his Justice are called his Strange Acts, *Isa. 28. 21.* But he delighteth in Mercy (f) which seems to be his darling Attribute. What means such expressions as those in *Hosea 6. 4. O Ephraim what shall I do unto thee? O Judah what shall I do unto thee?* but to shew that GOD would have all possible means used with his sinful People, before they are cut down? And when the fatal time is come, 'tis with an *How shall I give thee up O Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee Israel?* And *Jer. 9. 7. I will melt them and try them, for how shall I do for the daughter of my people?*

A P P L I C A T I O N.

What hath been said under this last Doctrine, give me leave now to Apply to this August and Numerous Assembly; and to the whole Land. And what we have heard I think will naturally lead us,

I. To Reflect upon what Means have been used with Us, that we might be a Fruitful or Religious People.

II. To consider, Whether if that notwithstanding the means that have been used with us for the ends aforesaid, any Symptoms are discernable upon us, whereby we have any reason to fear that we are under the Blast, or falling under the Wrath of GOD.

III. To Apply our selves (each one in his capacity) to endeavour the Revival of Religion and Virtue in the Land.

1. Then, as to the first of these, let us consider what means have been used with us for the Revival of Religion, or to make us a Virtuous and Religious People; and here we may know that much hath been done both by GOD and Men to attain that blessed end.

1. By GOD, and that (1) By his Word. What can we imagine that he could have said or spoken more unto us than he hath done? He hath made it the main work

(f) *Mich. 7. 18.*

work of the Ministry both formerly & more lately. Ever since I suppose any of us can remember, our Pulpits have cryed for REFORMATION. We were warned of our danger, and told of our duty by many a Servant of GOD, some now in Heaven, and some upon the Earth; so GOD dealt with his People of old. Jer. 7. 25. *Since the day that your Fathers came forth out of the Land of Egypt unto this day, I have even sent unto you all my Servants, the Prophets, daily rising up early and sending them.* So in Chap. 25. ver. 4. Chap. 29. 19. Chap. 35. 15. Chap. 44. 4.

(2) Let us consider, what GOD hath done for us by his Works, in the way of his Providence, both to recover us from our Spiritual Declensions, and to prevent our Apostacy.

And here, 1. We may consider, what GOD hath done for us, or confer'd upon us, in his ways and works of at least outward temporal mercies. Great Salvations GOD hath wrought for us. So he did for his People of old, as we may read in *Isa. 5. 1, 2, 3, 4.* And *Jer. 2. 6. 7. Mich. 6. 3, 4, 5.* And in many *Psalms* 'tis recorded, as in *Psalms 78*, and others. Truly scarce any People have so much to consider of the magnified, wonderful and manifold Mercies of GOD to them as we have: We may say to the praise and glory of GOD, as in *Psal. 147. ult. He hath not dealt so with any nation;* and that Sharp and Sarcastic Reproof in *Deut. 32. 6* may be applyed to us, *Do ye thus requite the Lord? &c. Is not he thy Father that hath bought thee? Hath he not made thee and establish'd thee?* *Hos. 11. 3, 4.*

2. We may farther consider what GOD hath done for us in a way of Judgment. With much fatherly pitty and compassion, GOD began with us, Sealing his Instruction, with his Fatherly Correction. And altho' we accepted not the Punishment of our Iniquities as we should have done, yet GOD destroyed us not. Many a time hath he turned away his Wrath. NEW-ENGLAND I hope hath not forgot the dark series of Judgments that they have passed through, and some of an uncommon kind; and what may be still in store for us we know not, but many are mistaken if the times that we live in are not very dark and threatening. 2ly. Let

ly. Let us consider, what Means have been used by Man to make us a Religious & Virtuous People. Altho' we may fear that all hath not been done that might have been done by Men of various Capacities to effect this blessed work, yet very considerable hath been done. What Pious Proclamations have we had from Supreme Authority, I mean from Crowned Heads, in the last Reigns? The Throne of *Great Britain* hath sent forth its Thunders against *Vice, Immorality & Prophaneness*. At the happy REVOLUTION, which caused the Hearts of Protestants to Sing for Joy; I mean at the Accession of *King WILLIAM* and *Queen MARY*, to the *British* Throne, we may remember what a Proclamation came forth. And afterwards by her late Majesty *Queen ANNE*, which hath been read in our Churches and Courts. And after that by his late Majesty *King GEORGE the First*, Entitled, *A Proclamation for the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue, and for the Preventing and Punishing of Vice, Immorality and Prophaneness*: As also what hath been done by his present Majesty on the *British* Throne, (whom GOD I pray preserve) And of that I may have occasion to say something by and by. The tendency of all which Proclamations is, that we may be a *Virtuous* and a *Religious* People. And that all Men of every Degree & Quality might thereby be stirred up to do what in them lies to Prevent, Convict, Suppress & Punish the apparent Vices of the times, that they might not in defiance of all Authority, be Rampant in the Land, and baffle all endeavours for their Suppression: That Profane Curiosity, Swearing, Lewdness, Excessive Drinking, Profanation of the Lord's Day, and other immoral & disorderly practices, may be faithfully born witness against, and reformed; or if they refuse to be reformed, that they may be by Personal and not National, and so Land desolating Sinners. And that Officers in trust might be quickned in their Duty. Agreeably hereunto, our Godly Governors have been calling upon us, insomuch as that for many Years past we could scarce hear a Proclamation for a public Fast, but serious & solemn calls were therein conjoined to Repentance & Reformation. Yea the whole *General Assembly* have been active therein, and deeply concerned even from the Days of our Forefathers

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And

And in our Ecclesiastic State, besides what was done in the first founding of these Churches, that we might be a Fruitful People ; in the beginning of our degeneracy, or rather when we were sinking therein, a SYNOD for Reformation was Assembled, which was a Representative Body of these Churches of our Lord. And the Synods that we have had in this Land have done great & good things for the Promotion or Revival of Religion ; the Reforming Synod that I have mentioned, aimed at a great Advancement in reforming work. Yet we may not suppose that their work was perfect, or that it came to a *Ne plus Ultra* ; and by the same reason that they went so far therein as they did, we might perhaps by the Blessing of Heaven go farther.

The Ministers of the Gospel, those Pastors & Elders of the Churches, have Preach'd & Pray'd to the utmost of their Abilities, I hope for Reformation. And that both the present & preceeding Ministry, the latter of which are gone to Heaven, and it will be well for us if they are not gone with that account of the Prophet, in Jer. 6. 29, 30. *The Bellows are burned, the Lead is consumed,* &c. i. e. The Instruments are worn out, and all means are spent, and yet the People are Reprobate or Barren.

The Churches of Christ in the Land have acted considerably in this work of Reformation, not only in their first Embodying, but also some of them by the Renewal of their Covenant (a Duty too much neglected among us) And when Persons own the Covenant in order to receive Church privileges, they publicly enter into solemn obligation about this work. It cannot be expected that I can enumerate all that hath been done, but yet so much may be said upon it ; or some may be ready to think, that unless it be Family and Personal endeavours, *Quid enim nisi vota supersunt.* For what remains save only Prayers.

II. Let us consider, whether if notwithstanding all the means that have been used to make us a Reformed or Religious People, there are any Symptoms discernable upon us, whereby we have any reason to fear that we are under the Blast, or falling under the Wrath of GOD.

When

When our Blessed Lord had been speaking concerning the ruin of the Temple at *Jerusalem*, there were those that asked him saying, (Luke, 21. 7.) *Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?* On this motion he foretells the Signs that should be before the Destruction of the Temple, and City of *Jerusalem*, as also the Signs that should be before the last Day, with an Exhortation to watchfulness; to the end of that Chapter.

And altho' we have no enurance of a Temporal overthrow or destruction, similar to that of the Jews (tho' we should continue in our Degeneracy, and die in final Apostacy; but only of our Spiritual and Eternal Death) Yet I humbly conceive that when these Signs following appear, they are more portentous of the destruction of a professing People of GOD (one way or another) than the most amazing prodigies that appeared in or over the Temple at *Jerusalem*, before their overthrow, or the greatest Quakings of our Earth, or the most Draconick Comet that ever blaz'd in the *Æther*; unless that in our *Logic*, we can separate Causes & their Effects; or in *Divinity*, reconcile Salvation & Impenitency. And let us consider whether any of the following tokens are upon us, whereby we may make some judgment of our Selves.

1. Then more generally, when a People by their long unprofitableness under all the means of Grace, have rendered themselves incapable of profiting by any means; and are under hardness of Heart, and consequently reprobate to every good work. As in *Jer.* 6. 29, 30. before quoted, and see in *Rom.* 1. 28. 2 *Tim.* 3. 8. *Titus* 1. 16. *Jer.* 7. 25, 26. But it may be said, *Dolus latet in Generalibus.* Deceit lyes in Generals.

2ly. Then particularly, let me say,

1. When a Degenerate People are utterly careless and unconcerned about their own Reformation & Salvation; when they see no need of it, but scorn and scoff at such as exhort thereto. See *Isa.* 21. 11, 12. *The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the Night? Watchman, what of the Night?*

&c. (g) Some have thought that these words were spoken in a way of scoff or derision, *q. d.* You Prophet, you profess your self to be a Warder, and to watch for the good of your People, what tidings have you for us? You and your fellow Prophets threaten us with Nights of Affliction; but we enjoy fair Day light of Prosperity, Peace and Liberty. What think you of it now, *Watchman, what of the Night? Watchman, what of the Night?* We have more to the same tenor in *Jer.* 17. 15. and *Isa.* 5. 19.

2. When a People are grown wilful in their ways of sinning against, and backsliding from GOD. When they wilfully refuse to Repent and Reform; and wilfully oppose and resist both GOD and Man in the Improvement of all Means to bring them to Repentance and Reformation, *Isa.* 30. 15, 16. *For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, in returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your Strength; and ye would not. But ye said, No, &c. Jer.* 2. 25. — *But thou saidst, there is no hope, No, for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go. And Jer.* 18. 11, 12. and 8. 5. & 44. 16. *Zech.* 7. 11, 12. Hence GOD saith in *Lev.* 26. 23, 24. *Aid if ye will not be reformed by these things, but will walk contrary unto me: Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your Sins. And Ezek.* 18. 21.

3. When a degenerating People will not understand, discern nor consider the proper Time and Season of their Repentance and Reformation. *Isa.* 30. 18 *And therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have Mercy upon you; for the Lord your God is a God of judgment; Blessed are all they that wait for him. And in the 19th of Luke* 41, 42, 43. before quoted.

4. When the Sins of the Times are become unreformable and the positive Duties of the Times are become impracticable. *i.e.* When both Repentance and Reformation

Reformation are become impracticable and impossible to such a People. True it is, that Repentance and Reformation are never impossible or impracticable to any People, if GOD undertake it for them *by Himself*, i. e. in the more immediate and extraordinary way of his working. He can give Resurrection to a People dead and buried in their Graves, *Ezek. 32. 3.* But tho' we may not say that Repentance and Reformation are impracticable or impossible for GOD in such an immediate and extraordinary way of working by himself; yet we may know that it is sometimes so, according to the ordinary and mediate way of working by Means. Now the Sins of the Times may be said to be unreformable, when they are multiplied and aggravated under the Improvement of all Means to suppress, subdue and reform them, when they grow more general and powerful, and prevail to frustrate all Means for Reformation; but especially, when GOD leaves or gives up a People to their Sins. And there is great danger of this when the Sins of the Times become customary, or when any way of sinning is become a general Custom, or the *Way* of a People, then 'tis next to unreformable. *Jer. 13. 23. Can the Ethiopian change his Skin, or the Leopard his Spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do Evil.* Or when Sin or a way of sinning, carries away the Heart or Spirit of a People; and so it becomes the Spirit of the Times: When their Hearts are set upon their Iniquities. *Hos. 4. 8. Jer. 22. 17. Their eyes and hearts are not but for their covetousness.* Worldly Lusts are very unreformable. Sins that have been Propagated from one Generation to another, from Parents to Children, and so in a sense are ingenerated or contempered into or with the very Constitution of a People, are hard to be rooted out. Such were the Sins of GOD's People of old; and GOD often puts them in mind of it, that from the days of their Fathers they had been *so and so* sinful, *Jer. 17. 1. and 22. 21. and 32. 30.* Hereditary Diseases in the natural Body are seldom if ever cured; Such Sins render the Duties that GOD calls for in the way and work of Reformation next to impracticable; for they are always inconsistent with the Sins of the Times, i. e. Such Duties as can't be practised without the Suppression of the

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the Sins of the Times; as in Isa. i. 16, 17. *Cease to do evil, learn to do well.*

And the *Duties* of the Times become impracticable, when the Hearts of a People are turned from them and set against them, as when they are so set upon their Sins, as that they are set against their Duties, *Jer. 22. 17.* If we do not love our Duties, we can never practice them to divine Acceptation. A constrained Obedience may come from the very Devils, among whom no Reformation may be expected. Many more awful Tokens I might insist on.

But

sly and *Finally*, When a People sink into Despair, and are without Hope concerning themselves, and give up all thoughts of Reformation as a matter to them impracticable and impossible, and so resolve to trouble themselves no more about it. Thus GOD represents that People desperately speaking, *Ezek. 10. 33.* — *If our Iniquities and Sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?* They speak as if they were hopeless, or despairing of any Repentance or Reformation; but more desperately did they speak, *Jer. 22. 13.* *Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we shall dye.* O let us not then despair!

But in the

III. and last place, Be excited each one in his Sphere or Capacity, to do what he can for the revival of Religion and Virtue in the Land; that we may be a People fruitful to GOD; and then shall we be an happy People; for it is He that can untie every *Gordian-Knot*, extricate out of every Labyrinth, and deliver us from all our Perplexities, Distresses, Fears and Dangers. And as we have heard, if at length the Tree bring forth Fruit, all will be well.

And suffer me here to say,

i. That it must be with great pleasure and satisfaction in the Breast of every true Christian, and especially in Christ's Ministers, to behold our *Civil Rulers* using proper means to make us a Religious and Virtuous People: And in a particular manner to find, that His Excellency our present Governor hath appeared ready to exert himself on this head.

It

It was counted of old an happiness for a People to have a Governor from the midst of themselves, as in *Jer.* 30. 21. It is eminently so when the pure and undefiled Religion of a People is the object of his Paternal Affection and Care. And how much this is our case we have heard in several Speeches, that we have been favoured with, and particularly in a Proclamation by His Excellency, *For the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue, and for the Preventing and Punishing of Vice, Profaneness and Immorality.* Which is publickly read in our Courts immediately before the Charge is given. And we have great reason to believe, that that Religious Proclamation proceeded from a due sense of the great and indispensable duty of the Civil Magistrate, by all possible ways to Promote and Encourage Virtue and Religion, and the strict observation of GOD's holy Law, the strongest band of human Society, and the most stable and firm foundation of Government; and to discountenance and punish all Impiety and Immorality, &c. (as in the said Proclamation) And that which adds to the Lustre of that pious endeavour, is that it was in humble imitation of the Royal Example of His Majesty's Piety and Goodness, who has so often recommended and enforced the practice of Virtue and Religion, and in conformity to His Majesty's Royal Instructions to His Excellency, &c. And with the Advice of His Majesty's Council of this Province, that the firm Resolutions contained in that Proclamation were undertaken. And all it seems under an Awful Sense of that Strict Account that Civil Rulers must hereafter give to the Supreme Lawgiver, *whose Kingdom ruleth over all.* And the Greatest and most Serviceable among Men are lyable to the Stroke of Death, and must be brought to that Strict Account.

Death shot near to your Excellency, when her fatal Dart lately struck our late Honourable Lieutenant Governor *TAILER*! And I think that our Tears may this Day be properly called for on his Grave: For by his Amoture, *New-England* hath lost a Friend, a true Friend, and that in a dark, stormy and threatening Season; one who was of a Generous, Magnanimous, Heroic and Princely Spirit, and an Honour to the Government. One who loved us, and one whom we loved,

loved, not only when he sat in the chief Chair of the Government, but also at other times: For his Services to his Country seem'd always ready, both in Civil, Military & Religious Regards. It may truly be said of him, *That He Liv'd Desired, and Dy'd Lamented!* May the GOD of all Consolation comfort his Orphan Family, and the Poor who have lost a Charitable and Generous Benefactor. We may call to mind the 6th & 7th verses of the 82d Psalm, *I have said ye are gods: And all of you are Children of the most high: But ye shall dye like Men, and fall like one of the Princes.* But GOD hath spared your Excellency to us, and preserved your precious Life, we hope to be a great Blessing to the Land in many Respects, and particularly in promoting Religion and Virtue among us.

And it may justly be our expectation from all the Branches of our Honorable Legislature, that they unite in their Endeavours after those blessed Ends.

And may GOD direct His Excellency our GOVERNOUR, His Majesty's Honourable COUNCIL, and the Honorable House of REPRESENTATIVES, in all their Debates and Consultations, unto such Schemes & Measures, Acts and Resolves as may be for GOD's Glory, and our own Safety and Prosperity.

RELIGION with the greatest Importance calls for your Patronage and Nurture. And all such Acts whereby both the Tables of the Moral Law may be supported and defended: The Civil Magistrate, being *Custos utriusq; Tabulae*, should guard Religion towards GOD, and Righteousness towards Man. This is One (I humbly conceive, if not the principal) Reason of these our Lectures on these our *Election-Days*. 'Tis not because we in the Gospel-Ministry are thought to be acquainted with the Elements of Civil Government, so as to be able to assign the Ballance of the Parts thereof, or any *Arcana Imperij*, which things are neither our Study nor Ambition; but as Ambassadors for Christ to remind and beseech you (and if I may use the Apostles Phrase, *as tho' GOD did beseech you, &c.*) to regard the Interests of Religion, which as they are for

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for *G O D's Glory*, so for our Life. And in a particular manner, I humbly propose to Consideration, whether some Acts or Laws against the Vices of the Times, are edg'd or sharpened with sufficient Penalties; and in particular, whether enough hath been done to punish the Violation of *GOD's Holy Sabbath*; that Article of the standing or falling of the Tree: And more particularly to consider whether the Posting of *Warrants*, or other publick Intelligence, on Meeting-Houses on Sabbath-Days, as the Custom is in many Places, whereby the proper Rest and Duties of that Day are disturbed, ought not to be redrest by the Civil Magistrate.

Commutative Justice, all will acknowledge to be within the Sphere of the Civil Magistrate; And as an honorable Support is in Justice due to each Branch of the Legislature, according to their respective Posts and Services, and to all Persons in publick Trust; so if it should happen that Injury should be done by the Publick to particular Persons, they ought to be repaired, and a just Restitution should be made; according to the Doctrine once delivered to our General Assembly by the late Reverend and Learned Mr. *Pemberton*, (f) once Pastor of a Church of Christ in this Place, but now with GOD: "Otherwise (saith he) tho' we were as a Signet at GOD's right Hand, He would pluck us thence".

Once more, Suffer me to say to our Honorable General Assembly, as *Tertullus* the Orator said to Governor *Felix* (Acts 24. 2.) *That 'tis by you that we enjoy great quietness, &c.* I mean that 'tis by your Wisdom and Care (under GOD) that a PEACE hath been settled and maintained with our ancient *Indian* Enemy, and Opportunities are put into our Hands to serve the Interests of our Holy Religion among them. Had such measures as have been lately taken with them been put into practice about *Thirty Years* past, what an Effusion of Christian Blood and Treasure, and doleful *Pagan* or *Popish* Captivities, by the Blessing of Heaven, might have been prevented? And a great part

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of

(f) See his Sermon on *Hos. 7. 9.* Pag 16. Referring plainly to the dark Time of 1692, at *Salem, &c.*

of that Perplexity which a distressed Province is now brought into respecting a Medium of Trade.

Could you hear the Wishes and Prayers of the Inhabitants of our exposed Frontiers in Time of War, who have been wont to be in fear of *the Adder in the Path*, and of the *Noise of the Archers at the Places of drawing Water*, and to lye down and rise up in Fear. Or in general, to be exposed to the doleful Calamities of a bloody War, doubtless they would be, that Peace might be cultivated and maintained. Matth. 7. 12. *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

2dly. It is also very desirable, & an hopeful Sign to see the Pastors and Churches of Christ among us, using various and suitable means for the Revival of Religion in the Land.

I hope that I am sensible of my incapacity, to add any thing to the knowledge of *my Reverend Fathers and Brethren in the Ministry*, or to be a Director to them about the most proper means to be used with a degenerate People.

I know that it hath been a matter that hath lain very near to the Hearts of many, if not most, and I hope all the Ministers of Christ in the Land, for some Years past; and on that account several Associations of Pastors have turned their Meetings into days of Fasting and Prayer; and invited their Churches and Congregations to join with them therein. To seek to GOD for the Revival of Religion in the Land, and for the Divine Blessing on the Rising Generation: Which hath in some places been followed with remarkable Success, insomuch as that some who never apparently minded Religion before, after that were seen with their Faces Zion-ward: for which cause we should bow our knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole Family of Heaven and Earth is named, as with Thankfulness for such emanations of his Grace, so with continued Supplication for the progress of the work of Reformation in the Land.

The

The Times that we live in are perillous as the last must be, 2 *Tim* 3. 1. And by the late turn of them, some of Christ's Witnesses have been greatly wounded in the Street, (g) and their Ministerial Endeavours for the Spiritual and Eternal good of the Souls of Men, have been very much disserved thereby; for the poor Mans Wisdom is despised, and his Words are not heard, *Ecc*l. 9. 16.

But that which adds to our Burden is, that the Alarms that we hear from one quarter or another carry with them sometimes *Horribilia de DEO, et Terribilia de fide*, &c. Concerning the Godhead or Sacred Trinity, that our Blessed Saviour is not Co-essential with the Father, and consequently not Co-equal nor Co-eternal. And some would induce us to believe that Hell-fire is shortly, or in sometime to be quench'd, or that the Torments of Hell are not everlasting: Other Errors we may expect or the Resurrection of some out of their Graves, in which they have Slept for a long time, like the two last that I have mentioned.

But who knows but that the more our Labours and Sufferings are here, the greater Reward GOD may graciously give us hereafter.

It bears a good aspect upon Religion and our Ministry in particular, when our Churches and all that belong to GOD, Strengthen our Hands in that Blessed work that we are called to; but as bad if by them we should be weakened, and Religion wounded in the house of its Friends. Or when the true Evangelical Pastors of the Churches acting by divine Rule, are calumniated with despotic Rule or Government.

That the Ministers of the Gospel, or Evangelical Pastors, are Rulers, I think is a point that is generally acknowledged; but as to the extent of their Power in governing their respective Charges, Men are not so well agreed therein. It had been well (as I humbly think) for the Church, if on *the one hand*, her Rulers did never in-

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gross

(g) i. e. The Market Place.

gross into their hands more power than ever their Lord assign'd them, and thereby have lorded it over the Lord's Heritage. And on the *other hand*, if the Sons of *Korah* had never made any intrenchments on the Priestly Office, but had been contented with the Privileges that their Lord hath left them.

Then doth the Church flourish, when her Guides understand their Duty & practice it; and the Brethren are apprised of their Privileges, and maintain them, and obey them that rule over them in the Lord.

3ly. It would afford occasion of great Joy, if those that have the care of the Government, and Instruction of the Rising Generation, would exert themselves to their utmost in training them up in Religion. It hath been thought by some, that if ever we are a Reformed People, that our Reformation must begin here; and how greatly then is it to be desired, that Heads of Families would do their Duty therein: For Families are the beginnings of Human Societys, and therefore if our Reformation be according to Christ's Rules, then Christian Oeconomy should be principally regarded, and particularly the duties required in the Fifth Commandment in the Decalogue. For 'tis natural for Children to think their Parents to be the most wise and powerful of Mankind. Such conceptions they take in with their first Aliment: And as they grow up, if they are not well governed, they are prone enough to improve their young Logic to this conclusion, *viz.* That their Superiors in State or Church, must yeild to their Stubborn Wills. Hence 'tis that as in Isa. 3. 3. *The Child shall behave himself proudly against the Ancient, and the base against the Honourable.*

Dr. *Prideaux* in a Sermon of his on the Fifth of November, seems to hold forth, that it was *Bichri's* defect towards his young *Sheba*, that brought him at last to found that Treasonable Blast, (b) *We have no part in King David, nor inheritance in the Son of Jesse, &c.*

'Tis

'Tis happy when Schools of Learning are duly supported, attended and regulated. And we can never be thankful enough to GOD, for putting it into the Hearts of our Fore-fathers to Found a *College* in *New-England*, that *Primrose* of all His Majesty's Dominions in *America*. May GOD bless that Society, and all the Seminaries of Learning among us, which are the Glory of our Land, reward their Benefactors, and bless and assist all concerned in the Government and well-ordering of them; for whoever Planted, and whoever Waters them, yet *GOD alone gives the Increase*.

Lastly, As to the *whole Body of this People*, Personal Reformation is to be wish'd and pray'd for, for every one of them, and by every one to be endeavour'd after. Man, Thy Life is a Tree shortly to be cut down, how soon none knows. Many sudden Deaths have been in our Land in a Year or Two past, and some very tragical, and sad Accidents, more than usual it hath been tho't in the same time formerly! Let us all then endeavour to bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance, and apply our selves to GOD in Prayer to revive Religion among us, or to make us fruitful to himself; for 'tis He alone that can make us so, according to that of the Prophet, speaking of the Cedar of the Gospel, in the 17th Chapter of *Ezekiel*, and the last Verse, with which I conclude; *And all the Trees of the Field shall know that I the Lord, have brought down the high Tree, have exalted the low Tree, have dried up the green Tree, and have made the dry Tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it.*

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